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ABSTRACT

As schools in highly industrialized America intensify their efforts to be competitive in the global economy, students are experiencing intensifying pressures on their time. This analysis looks at the words of four highly successful boys in New York City juxtaposed with national reports, web sites, magazine and newspaper articles to trouble the idea of the temporal discipline of the successful "adolescent." The author hopes to open up a space for alternative thought and action by problematizing the notion of the "successful" adolescent, by looking at how the temporal discipline which is seen as so desirable in "successful" adolescents, and the lack of which is found problematic in "unsuccessful" and "at-risk" adolescents, can be interpreted as an effect of power which narrows what the adolescent regards as possibilities in his/her life. (Contains 17 references.) (GCP)

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Time Bomb: How power functions in the temporal discipline of adolescents

By Joyceln Yen Yen Woo

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Statement of the Problem: The Neutrality of Time

In the US, a considerable amount of talk in education has been about being competitive in the global marketplace. In tandem with the fear of losing out on global competitiveness in the future is the willingness of many educators, policy-makers, and parents to recommend and tolerate temporally framed disciplinary practices. For example, in the report, Prisoners of Time, the authors critique "the degree to which today's American school is controlled by the dynamics of clock and calendar" (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994, p. 7) and recommend that time must become "an adjustable resource" (National Commission on Time and Learning, 1994, p. 9). In the report, this translates into giving schools the option to extend school hours and the school day, and keeping schools open longer.

As schools in highly industrialized America intensify their efforts to be competitive in the global economy, students are experiencing intensifying pressures on their time

Making the Familiar Strange Through Foucault

In the following analysis, I look at the words of 4 highly successful boys in New York City juxtaposed with national reports, web sites, magazine and newspaper articles to trouble the idea of the temporal discipline of the "successful" adolescent[i]. This is a deliberate choice, working against the unquestioning adoption of a language of deficit that dwells in a considerable amount of research on adolescents and time. For instance, research studies are often concerned with "at-risk" adolescents have also been revealed to have "poor time allocation," and "weak future orientation" (Bruno, 1995, p. 102).

In the spirit of Foucault's work, I wish to open up a space for alternative thought and action by problematizing the notion of the "successful" adolescent, by looking at how the temporal discipline which we find so desirable in "successful" adolescents, and the lack of which

we find problematic in "unsuccessful" and "at-risk" adolescents, can be interpreted as an effect of power which narrows what the adolescent regards as possibilities in his/her life.

Specifically, I use the interrelated Foucaultian concepts of power and discipline to analyze the data. Unlike the Marxist idea of power that is traced to a particular class of people (Marx & Engels, 1996) and particular institutions (Althusser, 1971), intended to repress, power, according to Foucault, plays a productive function. This concept of power leads me to pay special attention to discourses that are based on productive refrains such as: Americans must be "as knowledgeable, competent, and inventive as any people in the world" (National Commission on Time and Learning, 1994, p. 9).

I use discipline as an effect and procedure of power. Discipline is constituted by a set of distinctions and categories which are historically and socially constructed categories (Foucault, 1995, p. 146). In this paper, I will refer to distinctions such as "structured"/ "unstructured" time, and "rank" (Foucault, 1995, p.181). Further, I consider the functioning of one of the tactics of discipline - the double system of "gratification-punishment" (p. 180).

The Value of "Structured, Productive" Time

In broad discursive fields and in the adolescents words, I find the distinction made between "structured, productive" time and "unstructured, unproductive" time.

In the report, A Matter of Time (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs, 1992), the authors take a close look at community-based youth programs, and arrive at the conclusion that "risk will be transformed into opportunity for young adolescents by turning their nonschool hours into the time of their lives" (p. 15). The discourse in this report clearly makes the distinction between the risk of "unstructured" and the opportunity present in structured time. The solution to the danger that

"unstructured" time poses is to ensure that adolescents make "constructive use of this time" (p. 19) or risk not achieving "productive adulthood" (p. 28).

The urgency and the value of "structured productive time" takes on an explicit economic overtone with what Brown (2000) calls "a new sort of American childhood" in Silicon Valley. Brown highlights the lives of teenagers such as 17 year-old Alexa T., who tells us that "In school, you're learning as fast as you can so you can apply it as fast as you can so that you can become rich and successful by age 24" (p. C01). On the internet, such value is also reflected in the proliferation of web sites such as www.bonus.com where children can test their entrepreneurial skills, www.gazillionaire.com where teens run a trading company from space to learn economic concepts such as demand and supply, and www.mainexchange.com which lets young people invest 100,000 virtual dollars and win prizes. These web sites, which cater to children from elementary school to teens from high schools, assume that the quicker children and adolescents begin to "structure" their time around "productive" activities such as "investing," the more "successful" the children will be.

Discipline Through Reasoning

In the reasoning of the boys that I interviewed, this distinction is evident as well. In the following exchange, the boys make the distinction between the productivity-oriented "skipping school for a reason" and its opposition, "skipping school for no reason."

Interviewer: So what is a wrong use of time?

Seany: It depends on the person.

Sly: Skipping school or work.

Juju: Depends on what you are doing. Once I skipped school to do an interview at another school.

> Sly: That's not skipping school, that's not going to school for a reason. Skipping school is skipping school for no reason. Or skipping work for no reason. Because, you know, you are not using your time wisely by not going to school, 'cos you are not enriching yourself.

The boys rationalize that they have done nothing wrong if they do not go to school for the productive reason of interviewing at another school, an act that can potentially advance them to a further level in fulfilling their academic goals. Such reasoning ensures that these "successful" boys are able to govern themselves by having internalized the value of "structured, productive" time.

How power functions in such a potent fashion can also be analyzed by looking closely at how such "structured, productive"/ "unstructured, unproductive" distinction is present in the boys relation to themselves. Juju, for instance, assertively identifies himself as "a workaholic." He says, "I really wanted to do well and I think that I drove myself to do well. Till the point where I'd be working my tail off, and I'd be working harder than everybody else, I like to be working harder than everybody else sometimes. Because as long as I do well? Then I'm happy." As a "successful" adolescent, Juju sees his temporal being as being a "workaholic" where his time is structured around work, and perceives such an identification to be a productive one which improves his chances of getting what he wants in life. Echoing the discourses from the newspaper and magazine articles cited earlier, Juju has no doubt that he has "total control" over his time as he thinks that he can gear them towards his goals:

> I think your time depends on what you want to do with your life. If you want to work hard, you want to get good grades, you're obviously going to spend your time working, like staying at home, working. But if you want to spend your time, say, partying, or whatever, you'll be out partying, you won't get the good grades. It's all about, like, give

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> and take. 'Cause you can't do everything. So it's up to a person to choose what he or she wants to do. I think I have total control over what I do.

In his reasoning, Juju never questions the direct relationship between "success" and spending time in a "productive" fashion and, in opposition to that, the direct relationship between "partying" and being "unsuccessful." By considering the adolescent who "parties" as his oppositional counterpart, he is able to remain within the construction of success as getting good grades and the method of achieving such success as ensuring a "structured, productive" temporality. His self-location within this discourse prevents him from considering alternative definitions of "success" and alternative temporal modes of being.

The Tactic of Gratification-Punishment

The tactic of gratification-punishment is very much evident in the ways the boys indicate they have been trained into their temporal discipline. In school, the boys explain how they get punished by being "marked late" if they are late. At home, Juju talks about how he's "been brought up in a family where academics is more important than athletics," where if he does not "get the grades that [he] should, then things will be taken away.

Punishment works together with a reward system to ensure that the boys find it more pleasurable to maintain the "structured, productive" temporal discipline. Juju explains,

> I like those kinds of comments. I like when my parents, when my mom sees I'm high on the honor roll, like seven trimesters in a row, every time I've been eligible, I've been on it … she always says, I'm proud to be your mother. And I like comments like that. Comments like that keep me working. Keep me… keep me being a workaholic.

This double system of gratification-punishment ensures that the "successful" adolescent is a docile body, getting to class on time, completing his/her homework on time, fulfilling the

study requirements in time. It also ensures that the alternative of not internalizing such temporal discipline is taboo and should be avoided as pain will be inflicted and pleasure withheld.

The Distinction of Rank

Another tactic that produces the effect of temporal discipline and ensures that the alternative is avoided is through the distinction of rank. This means that the adolescents learn to associate the disciplined temporal existence with superiority and discount the un-disciplined temporal existence inferior. One domain in which they make this distinction in rank is in the type of school that they are in. For example, Hoti, tells me that he will be going to a famous and good public high school next in which his elder sister is having a stressful time dealing with the work and the tests. A good school that provides the greatest opportunity for the "success" of the adolescent is the one which provides a rigid and demanding temporal structure. Such reasoning ensures that these boys prefer this type of temporal existence and shun what they deem as the less demanding, less structured life in inferior public schools.

Another domain in which rank is used as a tactic to produce the disciplined and "successful" adolescent is how the classes are distinguished from each other in their school. Juju asserts proudly that he gets more homework than anyone else in school because he is "in all the high classes." Although Seany is also in two high classes, Juju says, "he takes French instead of Spanish. And I think it's easier. So, I guess I get more work than he does." The amount of work and the rigidity to which students in the higher classes have to subject themselves is deemed an honor and an indication of how "successful" the student is. The discursive high/ low distinction in the classification of classes further validates the divisions of rank.

Employing such a hierarchy ensures that "successful" boys like Juju never consider questions about his definition of success. Juju says that "most of the people in [his] classes ...

understand what [he's] doing, … why [he] has to work as hard as [he does]." Further, the other people who have different opinions about how hard he works are people whom he considers inferior. He explains,

> [The comments about how I spend my time are] not from any… person I really… regard highly. People who like, get, you know, "Oh, he's so good in every…" Like, "He's so good at this, he gets good grades on tests." You know, "He should be out partying" or whatever. And I… I just blank those talk. I just, like, put them in the back of my head …. [these are] people in the low classes. Some people in my school.

Here, Juju is explicit about the way he selects evaluations of his "success." His ranking of who is more "successful" and who is less so, ensures that he "blank[s] those talk" which does not comport with his view of how the "successful" adolescent should structure his time. Ranking therefore ensures that Juju, the "successful" adolescent, automatically screens the information he receives based on how it matches his temporal map.

The Economically-advantaged/-disadvantaged Differentiation

The "structured, productive"/ "unstructured, unproductive" distinction is further strengthened by the differentiation between poor, economically disadvantaged children who "suffer" from unstructured time and "normal," "successful" and economically advantaged children who are able to use their time in structured, purposeful ways.

The boys tell me,

> Juju: I think we have a lot of opportunities growing up here. We grow up in loving families, at least most of us, and we have a lot of opportunities, like these opportunities will help us in the long run to be what we wanna be when we grow up… and I think a lot

of kids, maybe for economic reasons, may not be able to get what they want or do what they wanna do. So, yeah, I think we …

Seany: We are open to all possibilities.

Their belief that they are "open to all possibilities" because of having grown up in "loving," economically-advantaged families, in opposition to those who are limited by "economic reasons", prevents them from accessing the "freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects upon it as a problem" (Foucault, 1984, p. 388). For Hoti, the consequence seems to be an unquestioned acceptance of a narrowing his own possibilities, despite his friends' and his own assertion that they are open to all possibilities because of their social and economic advantages. Hoti poignantly tells me,

> … when I was a kid, I wanted to be a soccer player, but then I realized that it was out of my reach… [because] I'm not good enough, I think … not just anybody can make it into a big soccer team. And … and now I kind of want to go more into business, maybe like a stockbroker or maybe a sports agent… a sports agent because I like sports and I want to be around sports. And a sports agent makes a lot of money… [a stockbroker] I guess, make[s] a lot of money … I don't really have a good explanation for it. I just feel that way.

For Hoti and his friends in their privileged world, the possibility of not making a lot of money is not open to them, as they appear to have construed their future as legitimate only if it consists in achieving material gains.

Part 2: Troubling the Temporality of My Foucaultian Analysis

In reflecting on my analysis of the words of the 4 adolescents, I realize that my interest in the subject of time emanates from my own lived history, the choices I have made I life, and my resulting conviction that in education, linear, productive, commodified temporality must give way to a more expansive temporality - the temporality that, according to Minkowski, "carries us on its wings toward worlds not only unknown but which appear to reason as nonexistent" (Minkowski, 1970, p. 41). Within such temporality, we can only hope to understand process, to understand the world to be "in the making" (Jacobson, 1965, p. ix), in relation to the temporal logic that emphasizes products and purposes that we can already conceive of.

This is why I titled this paper Time Bomb, at the point of submitting the proposal. I began with the assumption that there is something dangerous about the temporality we assume in education. The words in the poem The Dead Man Walking by Thomas Hardy (1840 - 1928) articulate what I think is dangerous about the unquestioned distinction between "structured, productive" time and "unstructured, unproductive" time:

--A Troubadour-youth I rambled
With Life for lyre,
The beats of being raging
In me like fire.

But when I practiced eyeing
The goal of men,
It *iced* me, and I perished a little then.

It is the "icing" which growing up brings that I worry about. By valuing adolescents' use of time as a commercial investment for the future and valuing "structured" time because it will

predictably enhance their "productivity" as adults, are we killing the lively, fiery "Troubadour-youth" and turning him into the dead man who eyes "the goal of men?"

A critical question emerges as I articulate my concern for the linear structured temporality in educational discourses. I must admit that was rather smug and gleeful in organizing the data into oppositional categories and techniques of power. What turned out was hardly surprising to me. Am I not closing off interpretive possibilities by knowing beforehand what I will find? This seems to contradict what I purport to value, the imagining of possibilities. What I mean by "the imagining of possibilities" is the continual summoning up of various ways of seeing, of various ways of being, embracing the "time of unexpectedness" (Lefebvre, 1999, p. 190). I am reminded of Dewey's explanation that what is wrong with most intellectual pursuits is the "fear of speculative ideas" that curtails "a free imagination of intellectual possibilities" (as cited in Greene, 2000, p. 272). While I experienced comfort in "finding" a suitable theoretical framework for my dissertation in the ideas of Foucault, I now wonder if, for me, Foucaultian analysis alone opens up new possibilities for thought.

Another question that disturbs me considerably is, what is the temporality in analyzing time through the Foucaultian framework? And what is the epistemological significance of such temporality? In citing the interview data with the 4 boys, I notice that I have used the present tense, eg. Juju "says." Such use of the present tense fits with the convention of how we quote data in social science research. However, what happens seems to be a lifting of the context of the utterance by locating it in the perennial present. In writing in this discourse, I seem to be able to deny the intersubjectivity of the encounter between me as the researcher and the Juju, as the participant of the research by removing the hints of what Fabian calls, intersubjective time (1983). While I live in the present, reading and writing, those I write about live in a "fictional

present." I write about them with the same temporal markers as I would write about characters and words I encounter in a literary text.

My Foucaultian discourse, where "its referent has been removed from the present of the present of the speaking/writing subject" (Fabian, 1983, p. 143), has also made it easy for me to say about the boys that I interview, "this is the case of the docile bodies." Am I, in speaking this discourse, imposing another of the type of "professional discourse" that Foucault critiques in his work? There is a sense, in my Foucaultian analytic exercise, that I am considering adolescents' temporalities at the "level of statements and concepts" as opposed to considering temporalities as active social processes (Smith, 1999, p. 176). By thinking at the somewhat static level of statements and concepts, is the temporality of my analysis not at odds with my own criticism of policies and approaches that "spatialize" time?

Conclusion

In the climate of the new economy and rapid technological change, discourses about time have intensified and are becoming unavoidable as each nation bandies about the need to master the future and to ensure that time is geared towards the preparation for living in a changing world. Amidst our rush into new ways of organizing time, my paper argues for thoughtful reflection on the powerful assumptions that undergird what we say, think, and do about the fundamental and encompassing issue of time for the benefit of desirable national "futures." In such reflection, we must also reflect on the tools that we use for such reflection, for we risk re-reifying the lived actualities of those we purport to want to affect.

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[1] I conducted a small study with a group of academically successful and economically well-off boys (Seany, Hoti, Sly, and Juju) who live in a genteel and wealthy New York City neighborhood. In the study, I asked the overarching question, "How do adolescents understand and experience time?" One focus group discussion was conducted with the four boys followed by one follow-up interview with each of them. They were also asked to take photographs of their lives that contextualized moments when they were very aware of time. These photographs served as elicitation devices in our interviews. It is assumed that the data collected from these boys, because of the limited times the boys were interviewed with an unfamiliar adult, reflects how they wanted to represent themselves to me.

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